

Sanpete County Profile

Prepared for the:
Dixie, Fishlake & Manti-La Sal National Forests
Forest Plan Revision
Social and Economic Assessment

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SANPETE COUNTY OVERVIEW



County Land Ownership

42.4% — Private
 38.1% — Forest Service
 13.3% — Bureau of Land Mgt.
 3.2% — State Trust Lands
 2.7% — State Wildlife
 0.3% — Other
 0 % — Wilderness Areas
 0 % — Wilderness Study Area

source: SITLA, 2003

County Planned Uses

69.9% — Sensitive Lands
 22% — Agriculture
 4.5% — Residential
 3% — Residential Agriculture
 0.3% — Business/Commercial
 0.2% — Public Facilities

source: Sanpete County

This overview contains observations drawn from the maps, economic and demographic trend data, and a review of county plans contained in this profile. In addition, it contains comments and explanations of county leaders and residents, gathered at workshops conducted to review this assessment.

Landscape

Sanpete County is centered on the agricultural Sanpete Valley, where numerous small towns lie surrounded by farm fields. Mountainous peaks to the east and west capture rainfall and supply much of the water that irrigates fields and supplies water to these communities. The county has a proud heritage and is noted for its historical buildings and landscapes that retain their rural charm. The county has a larger proportion of its land held in private lands than many other counties in the region, but a significant portion of the county is held by the USFS.

Population

Sanpete County's population more than doubled between 1970 and 2000 and is expected to continue growing at a steady rate. The county is feeling some growth pressure from the Wasatch Front as some current residents are able to commute out of the county for employment and a number of urbanites are establishing second homes in the valley. Some of the growth in the last decade came from the construction of the Central Utah Correctional Facility in Gunnison City, and the prison population likely comprises a large proportion of the government jobs. Migrant agricultural employees are also a part of recent population growth. The growth of Ephraim City and Snow College (roughly 2,500 students) has likely boosted both population numbers and contributed to the high educational attainment levels of the county. Average incomes are significantly lower than the state average, partly due to lower agricultural wages and a lack of industrial opportunities, but also likely due to a student population.

Economy

Since settlement, Sanpete County's economy has been agriculturally-based, serving as "Utah's granary." The county currently ranks among the top ten turkey-producing counties in the United States and agriculture supplied roughly 10% of total employment in 2002, but agriculture employment has fallen since 1980 and is projected to continue doing so as technology improves. Comments received from the county workshops

SANPETE COUNTY OVERVIEW

Current Issues

*maintaining current access to
Forests
ATV trails and campgrounds
unregulated winter uses
water development and
watershed protection
commuting workforce
grazing & timber operations
living wage jobs
wildlife management*

indicate that other agricultural industries—grazing and timber—have fallen off due to USFS policies that limit production. Mine closures in Emery County have also affected Sanpete County. As in much of the state, water is a limiting factor in Sanpete County to industrial growth and population expansion and USFS has the potential to affect water development opportunities. In general, the economy has become more tied to urban industries and is becoming more dominated by the service and non-farm proprietors sectors.

Planning

A principal concern of Sanpete County landowners and residents is protecting their rural lifestyle and heritage as the urbanization of the Wasatch Front slowly approaches. Public lands, which have a central influence on the culture and economy of the county, are also a major concern of land use planning. A major concern here is protecting the local water supply, which comes primarily from National Forest lands. The current water development proposal at Gooseberry Narrows is being closely watched. Access is another crucial issue and the county has established an access committee to actively deal with this issue. A primary focus of access discussions is the roadless area and wilderness designation rules that have changed recently, opening more possibilities for local activities. Other pressing needs include properly managing and protecting wildlife, wildlife habitat and public lands. To this end, the county has identified critical watershed, agricultural and recreational lands for preservation. Noxious weeds and pine beetle infestations are also immediate concerns. There is also a desire to promote tourism by preserving access to recreation in the surrounding countryside and forests, such as Palisade State Park. Unmanaged and under-managed recreation, such as backcountry snowboarding and ATV riding, poses a threat to the safety of users and the health of these lands. Planning documents reviewed, which were available at the time of this assessment, include:

Sanpete County, General Plan, 1997; Sanpete County, Title 14 Zoning, 2001

Sanpete County, Subdivision Ordinance, 1998

Sanpete Regional Heritage Tourism Project, 1996

Sanpete County Action Plan for Economic Development, 1993

Six County AOG, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, 2000

Utah State Historical Society, Beehive History: Utah Counties. 1988